

FINDINGS: The government of Nigeria continues to respond inadequately and ineffectively to recurrent communal and sectarian violence. Religion is a driving force in the violence, as a precipitating factor or proxy for political or social issues. Years of inaction by Nigeria's federal, state and local governments has created a climate of impunity, resulting in thousands of deaths. Other religious freedom concerns in Nigeria include the expansion of sharia (Islamic law) into the criminal codes of several northern Nigerian states and discrimination against minority communities of Christians and Muslims.

Based on these concerns, USCIRF recommends in 2010, for the second year, that Nigeria be designated as a "country of particular concern," or CPC. Prior to the 2009 CPC recommendation, Nigeria had been on USCIRF's Watch List since 2002.

Since 1999, a disturbingly large number of Nigerians—12,000, if not more—have been killed in attacks and reprisals between Muslims and Christians. This trend continues: in the past year, two major outbreaks of sectarian violence took place since January 2010 in and around the city of Jos, Plateau State that resulted in as many as 1000 people being killed. In addition, religiously-motivated violence by an extremist Islamic sect resulted in 900 – 2,000 deaths in several northern states in July 2009. The Jos violence was the most recent in a long line of violent incidents resulting in death and destruction, and instilling a sense of fear within Northern and Central Nigerian communities. The government of Nigeria has done little, if anything, to address sectarian and communal violence, making no serious effort to investigate or prosecute the perpetrators of the numerous killings and other crimes. Government leaders have failed to heed warning signs of violence, and the federal police have failed to respond effectively and appropriately—or even at all—when violence has erupted. The national legislature has exercised no discernible oversight over either the Ministry of Justice or the National Human Rights Commission to ensure adequate investigation and resolution of religious violence and intolerance. The Human Rights Commission, both by design and in effect, lacks the independence and resources to address these issues.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS: Religion is a driving force in the sectarian violence, as a

precipitating factor or a proxy for political or social issues. This, combined with the Nigerian government's toleration of criminal acts, has created a permissive environment for continued sectarian and communal violence, leading to a culture of impunity. The culture of impunity must be broken by the top levels of Nigerian government, including the highest ranking state and federal officials. USCIRF has concluded that Nigeria could, if it wished, muster the resources and capacity necessary to address communal, sectarian, and religious violence and intolerance. And must do so for the country to realize lasting progress, security, stability, and prosperity as a democracy. The United States should urge Nigeria to prevent and contain recurring sectarian violence by bringing perpetrators to justice, and should ensure that these issues are an important component of discussions of the newly established U.S.-Nigeria Bi-National Commission. Additional recommendations for U.S. policy towards Nigeria can be found in the 2010 Annual Report chapter on Nigeria and by following this link:

<http://www.uscifr.gov/images/ar2010/nigeria2010.pdf>